

How can the benefits of housing regeneration programs be sustained?

FORMAL EXIT STRATEGIES FROM SOCIAL HOUSING REGENERATION PROGRAMS ASSIST AN ESTATE TO BECOME A COMMUNITY BY INVOLVING LOCAL TENANTS, DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AND ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY-RUN SUCCESSOR ORGANISATIONS.

KEY POINTS

- Exit strategies implemented overseas have sustained the benefits of social housing regeneration programs aimed at improving the long-term self-sufficiency of a community.
- Of the five Australian public housing estates studied, only one had a formal social housing regeneration program exit strategy. The general lack of such strategies appears to stem from a lack of clarity as to whether the regeneration programs would finish at all. Where finish dates were established, housing officers were not clear on when exit strategies should commence.
- Barriers to implementing an exit strategy include: budget uncertainty; difficulties in coordinating service delivery across different agencies once the regeneration program has ended; and resolving conflicts between various stakeholders in a community.
- Ideally, local residents, government agencies and other relevant stakeholders should be coordinated by one skilled person during the planning and development stage of an exit strategy.
- No single exit strategy model can be applied universally, since each project has different objectives, funding mechanisms, time scales and physical and community assets. However, core elements of any exit strategy include: a formal plan; involvement of residents and key stakeholders; conflict resolution procedures; a process for transfer of responsibility for ongoing projects or functions; development of leadership; and formal evaluation procedures.
- The more time allowed for the development and embedding of an appropriate exit strategy, the greater the likelihood of successful transition beyond the end of the project.

*Based on research by **Keith Jacobs, Kathy Arthurson** (AHURI Southern Research Centre) and **Bill Randolph** (AHURI UNSW-UWS Research Centre). This bulletin examines the implementation of social housing estate renewal scheme exit strategies in Australia. The project combined a national audit of existing regeneration practices with interviews and focus groups in five public housing estates – Bridgewater in Tasmania, Salisbury North and The Parks in South Australia, and Minto and Windale in New South Wales.*



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CONTEXT

Social housing estate regeneration strategies are funded and facilitated by government for a discrete period of time, for particularly disadvantaged communities or locations. Most seek to sustain community standards and services without recourse to large injections of additional public funds.

In the UK, it was recognised in the 1990s that more effective policies were needed to sustain the benefits of the strategies after the formal end of regeneration activities.

This study examined the present operation of exit strategies in Australia, and the potential for their future implementation.

METHODOLOGY

The research included a review of international literature on the development of exit strategy regeneration models, a national audit of existing regeneration practices and investigations of five case study regeneration estates. Regeneration initiatives at different stages of development and using different strategies were selected as case studies:

- In New South Wales, one case study (in Minto), involving physical redevelopment and selling off housing for home ownership, had not completed the initial master planning stage. The second case study (Windale community renewal scheme), involved community initiatives only (not physical renewal).
- The two South Australian case studies (Salisbury North and the Parks) were well-established projects involving physical and social renewal, and were at a pre-exit stage.
- The Tasmanian case study (Bridgewater) was a mature project in which the regeneration project had formally ended and a community-based agency had been established to maintain the achievements of the program.

Field work in each area comprised semi-structured interviews with housing and regeneration professionals, and a focus group discussion with tenants and community representatives.

FINDINGS

Models of exit strategies

Fordham (1995) identified six key models of exit strategies.¹

- A range of long-term projects continue beyond the end of the renewal project.
- Flagship projects (eg employment programs) secure specific institutional goals in other agencies.
- Successor organisations continue to work in the area but are resourced by other local organisations or by residents.
- A single successor body strategically coordinates other organisations, and continues existing programs or develops new ones.
- Regeneration projects are continued by local mainstream organisations.
- Responsibility is transferred to another short-term funded agency.

Which model is appropriate depends on factors such as available resources, institutional capacity and commitment from other agencies to further the aims of the renewal project.

Of the five case studies, only one (Windale, NSW) had an exit strategy, though this was yet to be implemented. The transition plan had been developed by an incorporated community body with the Premiers' department, and aimed to transfer governance arrangements of the community from the state-employed Place Manager to a community-run body towards the end of the program.

Why aren't exit strategies in place?

Absence of an exit strategy was often due to housing officers' lack of knowledge about formal exit strategies. In the only case where the formal regeneration program had ended (Bridgewater, Tas), 'post-exit' initiatives and activities had evolved not through good planning but fortuitously – and had succeeded partly through the motivation of one individual.

Although renewal programs usually have a discrete time period (especially with physical renewal), there is

¹ Fordham, G. (1995) *Made to Last: Creating Sustainable Neighbourhood Regeneration* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

often a lack of clarity as to whether other elements (such as community development) will finish at all. For example, in South Australia a housing officer stated that 'it's a bit black and white to talk about an exit strategy'. Other cited barriers to developing long-term plans are the uncertainty of budgets, difficulties in obtaining funding, and the demands of day-to-day management.

In other cases (eg Minto), the end of the renewal project was considered too far in the future to predict future actions.

What might be needed in an exit strategy?

A formal plan

A number of housing officers and tenants recognised the benefit of instituting an exit strategy plan at the start of the renewal program. However, there was a lack of consensus as to when activities ought to commence.

Involvement of residents and key stakeholders

In all case studies, housing managers and residents agreed that residents and stakeholders should be involved in the planning and management of regeneration projects. With exit strategies, other stakeholders might need to be involved (eg local councils). If possible, existing social and community networks should be used. Involvement of residents is especially important when renewal strategies such as relocation are involved.

Conflict resolution

Housing officers and tenants were supportive of structures and processes to deal with conflict during and after a regeneration project. In some cases (eg Minto), conflict had arisen between tenants and the housing authority responsible for regeneration, and had led to a breakdown in relations. In other cases (eg Windale), conflict had arisen between tenant groups competing for a role in decision-making.

Conflict might be avoided with good communication and consultation at an early stage, to foster trust, but also through a formal conflict resolution process. Community workers in Windale felt that the best way to deal with rival groups was to facilitate meetings with affected groups, to work through the issues. The Community Reference Group at Salisbury North included a conflict resolution

function and mediation processes. In other cases (eg Bridgewater), conflicts had been dealt with at different levels, such as board meetings that residents were invited to attend.

Transition of responsibilities

Although handover of community development was anticipated, the timing was not usually specified.

Concerns about integrity of community were also apparent when the renewal strategy involved tenant relocation or where new residents were from a different cultural background. In these circumstances community building was considered an important objective that would need to be sustained or even increased when the physical redevelopment was complete and might also necessitate investment in community facilities such as parks and playgrounds.

Developing leadership and capacity building

In some cases, residents expressed concern over taking on responsibility for sustaining community regeneration, while others were sceptical about whether they would be entrusted with this responsibility. Housing workers believed that funded community worker positions would be needed in the future. In these circumstances, work needs to occur in building trust between both sides, in order that communities' capacities are built to take on responsibility. In Tasmania, the issues of getting local community involvement were resolved when a local resident was employed as the community worker which led to improved outcomes at a local level. However the death of this person has raised issues of succession planning.

Planning and evaluation

Housing workers saw evaluation as necessary. Most saw the success of an exit strategy as indistinguishable from that of the regeneration project overall. Commonly cited evaluation mechanisms included pre- and post-project modelling of the community based on key performance indicators such as levels of neighbourhood satisfaction, property values, housing management indicators, vandalism, crime statistics, school retention and unemployment rates. However, only one of the case studies (Windale) incorporated an evaluation strategy.

Measuring progress can take time. The Windale project had undertaken a benchmark study after two years of operation but had not detected significant change over that period. It can also be difficult to discern whether improvements in indices are a consequence of the project itself or external factors such as growth in the wider economy. One housing worker suggested that these indicators might be used to test when the formal community renewal phase actually ends and a handover to community begins.

Who should coordinate exit strategies?

Views differed as to which agencies are best placed to manage core services once regeneration projects are formally completed. Cross-sectoral working partnerships are generally valued as a way of developing a holistic approach to regeneration, but in practice, these partnerships can be problematic because of an increase in bureaucracy.

Interviewees suggested that, due to the complex nature of regeneration projects, decision-making should take place at a local level wherever possible. Ideally, local residents, government agencies and other relevant stakeholders should be involved in the planning and development of an exit strategy. The development of exit strategies seems to have been most effective where one skilled person coordinated the planning process and was able to bring these stakeholders together.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No single exit strategy model can be applied universally, since each project has different objectives, funding mechanisms, time scales and physical and community assets. However, drawing upon both overseas and Australian examples, it is clear that basic core elements of any exit strategies usually entail a combination of the following activities:

- Capacity building and training projects with residents during the renewal period;

- Business planning and project viability testing of appropriate post-renewal service management structures;
- Securing long-term funding arrangements for recurrent expenditures;
- Dedicated community based staff;
- Establishing successor organisations and community governance arrangements.

The more time allowed for the development and embedding of appropriate exit strategies during the lifetime of the renewal project, the greater the likelihood of a successful transition beyond the end of the project.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This bulletin is based on AHURI project 40200, *Developing appropriate exit strategies for housing regeneration programs*.

Reports from this project can be found on the AHURI website: www.ahuri.edu.au

The following documents are available:

- Positioning Paper
- Final Report

Or contact the AHURI National Office on +61 3 9660 2300.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS This material was produced with funding from Australian Government and the Australian States and Territories, AHURI Ltd acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from the Australian, State and Territory Governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

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